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## Casey leaves a poor legacy

WASHINGTON - Ronald Reagan loved Bill Casey. They were close in age (Casey is 73) and understood each other, so there was no sparring between them. Reagan gave large credit to Casey for his election campaign in 1980.

Casey was shrewd - some said cunning - and ruthless. He was able to read Reagan easily and gained great power carrying out his policies, the principal one being the Reagan doctrine of rolling back communism. He wanted only one job, director of central intelligence, and Reagan gave it to him.

There was no limit to what Casey could get from the president. He tripled the budget at the CIA, and as they like to say in Washington, he restored its morale.

But that's not all that Casey did. It's not an overstatement to say he was responsible for mining the harbors of Nicaragua. Other directors of central intelligence worked through deputies for covert operations. In Casey's CIA, he called the shots; he divided the agency so that only he knew all that was going on.

There is more to the mining story. It comes from a leader in Costa Rica who was close to Daniel Ortega, head of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. After the mining, the Costa Rican leader said that it was US policy to bring down Ortega.

Ortega, he said, was in trouble before the mining because of political and economic reasons. He said that Ortega's problems were well known in Costa Rica and the US government had been informed through diplomatic and CIA channels. It was reported that Ortega would step down - or be forced to do so - and be replaced by Interior Minister Tomas Borge, then considered by the US to be a better choice than Ortega.

But, the Costa Rican leader said, once US involvement was seen in the mining of Nicaragua, it solidified Ortega support and created a war-like atmosphere in Nicaragua, making a change

in government impossible. The Costa Rican said he could not understand why the CIA, which supplied and trained the people for the operation, pulled it off.

They did it because Casey had a commitment to the contras fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, and he thought they could win, which was a mistaken intelligence estimate.

The recent Senate committee report said the CIA held back information from the National Security Council and the president on the reliability of the Iranian who set up the arms deal. It also reported that the agency had prior knowledge of the illegal diversion of the Iranian arms money to the contras.

An official who has seen the records of the bank accounts from which money was transferred to the contras said the funds were so intermingled that no one will ever be able to determine how much money went to the contras and how much ended up in someone's pocket. He said the intermingling was done intentionally by the CIA to confuse anyone examining the accounts.

In other words, Casey was up to his ears in an operation that was outside the law.

It is the same Casey who, when he was appointed to the CIA job, refused to put his considerable holdings into a blind trust. As the CIA director, with access to more inside information than Ivan Boesky, he was still able to trade his own holdings based on information gathered for him at government expense.

It was the same Casey who, while CIA director, was an officer in a company that was getting millions of dollars in grants for the development of synthetic fuels. When questioned about it, he told a reporter that it was none of his business.

The same Casey was fingered as the person who produced President Carter's debate papers for a presidential debate with Ronald Reagan. The controversy that followed caused James Baker, who was chief of staff, to consider resigning.

Casey did not like to deal with Congress; he did not like to deal with the press. He did not like to tell anyone what he was doing. He would have fitted nicely in a dictatorship.

By the time the Reagan administration departs from the White House, Casey's term as head of the CIA will not be a credit.

*Robert Healy is an associate editor of the Globe.*